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THE EFFECT OF READING FOR A CREATIVE PURPOSE ON STUDENT
ATTITUDES TOWARD A SHORT STORY.

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THE EFFECTS OF A TRAINING PROGRAM AND OF CREATIVE AND
NONCREATIVE PREREADING WRITING TASKS WERE INVESTIGATED TO
TEST THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE COGNITIVE LEVEL AT WHICH A
LITERARY SELECTION IS READ DETERMINES THE ATTITUDES DEVELOPED
TOWARD THAT SELECTION. TWENTY SENIOR CLASSES TAKING
COLLEGE-PREPARATORY ENGLISH AT TWO MADISON, WISCONSIN, HIGH
SCHOOLS WERE DIVIDED INTO FOUR EQUAL GROUPS. TWO GROUPS
ATTENDED THE TRAINING PROGRAM, AND EACH WAS ASSIGNED EITHER A
CREATIVE OR NONCREATIVE PREREADING WRITING TASK. THE TWO
OTHER GROUPS WERE NONTRAINING GROUPS, BUT EACH GROUP WAS
ASSIGNED EITHER A CREATIVE OR NONCREATIVE PREREADING WRITING
TASK. EACH WRITTEN RESPONSE WAS RATED BY THREE JUDGES ON A
5-ITEM SCALE TO DETERMINE THE EXTENT OF CREATIVENESS OR
NONCREATIVENESS. AN ATTITUDE INVENTORY ESPECIALLY DEVELOPED
FOR THIS STUDY MEASURED THE ATTITUDES DEVELOPED AFTER
COMPLETION OF THE READING AND WRITING TASKS. IT WAS CONCLUDED
THAT THE NATURE OF THE PREREADING WRITING TASK INFLUENCED THE
KIND OF ATTITUDES DEVELOPED TOWARD THE SELECTION READ, BUT
THE DIRECTION AND INTENSITY OF THESE ATTITUDES WAS LIMITED TO
THE ACADEMIC OR ABILITY LEVELS OF THE STUDENT. THE TRAINING
PROGRAM HAD NO EFFECT ON ATTITUDINAL DEVELOPMENT. FURTHER
RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS OF VARYING ABILITIES AND WITH
DIFFERENT LITERARY FORMS IS SUGGESTED. THIS PAPER WAS
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The Effect of Reading for a
Creative Purpose on Student
Attitudes toward a Short Story

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Purpose of the Study

The development of positive attitudes toward literature is a major objective of all reading programs. The National Council of Teachers of English (1956) is explicit in its assertion that "If the study of literature does not provide enjoyment, the teaching has been a failure."

Unfortunately, very little is known about how to foster appreciation for particular literary selections. Krathwohl, (1963) in his taxonomy of educational objectives for the affective domain comments that "We regret the lack of research dealing with clear-cut affective objectives of the school." We do know from observation that the teacher variable is a factor in determining how students will respond to a particular piece of literature. Except for teacher characteristics we have very little information about the effects of specific variables on the development of positive or negative attitudes toward a literary selection.

The study reported here is based on the generally accepted position that literature can be read at various cognitive levels. It is assumed that the cognitive level at which a literary selection is read is a determining factor in the development of attitudes toward that selection. The following hypothesis was generated to test this assumption:

If capable high school seniors are oriented to the reading of a short story by a pre-assigned creative writing task, their attitudes toward the story will be more positive than if they are oriented to it by a pre-assigned, noncreative writing task.

It was felt that instructing students in basic differences between creative and noncreative writing tasks might affect their attitudinal responses. Therefore, the effects of a training program on the dependent variable was investigated as an ancillary concern.

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Background of the Study

To test the hypothesis and the ancillary concern of this study it was necessary to (1) select particular cognitive levels for reading, (2) devise a means for stimulating reading at those cognitive levels, (3) design a training program to illustrate basic differences in behavior at those cognitive levels, (4) select student subjects, (5) choose a literary selection and (6) construct an attitudinal inventory to measure attitudes toward that literary selection.

Selection of Cognitive Levels

The cognitive level selected as being most likely to influence attitudes positively was the level of creativity. The rationale for this selection was based on the conclusions of Torrance (1963) that many things can be learned creatively more economically than they can by authority and that some people strongly prefer to learn creatively. Creativity was defined in accordance with Bloom's (1956) level of "Synthesis." The essence of cognitive behavior at this level is the combination of new experience with past experience in a way that gives rise to a pattern or structure not clearly there before. The cognitive level selected as being less likely to influence attitudes positively was the level of "Interpretation", also as defined by Bloom. The essential characteristic of behavior at this cognitive level is the discovery of relationships in a given communication. For the purposes of this study, this cognitive level was termed "noncreative."

Stimulating Reading at Different Cognitive Levels

Writing has long been considered to be an exercise that stimulates thinking. Burack (1965) comments that "We ask our students to write because writing makes them think For some of our students writing will mean the freeing of the intellect." Therefore, it was decided to construct writing tasks at two different cognitive levels relative to the same literary selection. These tasks were presented to the subjects prior to the reading task to cause them to read the selection

at the cognitive level of the task. The tasks were completed after reading. Half the subjects received the following task, which was constructed to stimulate thinking at the level of creativity:

The main character in this story experiences quite an attitudinal change during the course of the story. When you have finished reading the story, project Ivan ten years into the future and write a short scene involving him with anyone and/or anything in any setting you wish to create.

The other half of the subjects received the following task which was constructed to stimulate thinking at the level of "Interpretation":

In this story the author discloses a number of things about the main character, Ivan, through his thoughts, speech and actions. When you have finished reading the story, write a brief description of Ivan based on the author's disclosures and then state briefly the main point the author is trying to make in this story.

Selecting Student Subjects

The subjects selected for the experiment were students in twelfth-grade English classes designated as "college-preparatory." It was felt that these students would have less difficulty with basic reading skills than any other students in the school and hence would be better able to read at the higher levels suggested by the tasks.

Choosing the Literary Selection

A short story was chosen as the literary selection to be used because short stories are typically included in English curricula at all academic levels and because one could be found that would permit the desired experimentation to be completed within one fifty-five minute class period. The specific story, "Alexander to the Park" (1961) was selected as the test story because it appeared in a collection of writings prepared for students at this academic level, and because in the experience of the investigator it tended to receive both positive and negative reactions from student readers.

Constructing the Attitudinal Inventory

The attitudinal inventory was constructed by the investigator to measure the direction and intensity of attitudes toward the specific story being used.

Language used to construct thirty items was solicited from seventy-six "college-preparatory" seniors in a high school with a student body similar to those of the schools used in the experiment. These students were asked to write their feelings about the story immediately after they had read it. These thirty items were arranged in a Likert-type format and pilot tested with 105 "college-preparatory" seniors in still another high school. On the basis of an analysis of the pilot-study data, the six items that discriminated best were selected and randomly assigned to positions in a Likert-type attitudinal inventory as follows:

1. This was a good story.
2. I was able to get involved in this story.
3. This story disappointed me.
4. This was a dull story.
5. Reading this story was a pleasant experience.
6. This story dragged.

These six items constituted the inventory used in the actual experiment. The subjects selected one of the following choices for each item: Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. The choices were weighted on a 1 - 5 point scale, and each inventory was scored on that basis.

Designing the Training Program

Part of the pre-treatment training program consisted of a tape recorded script used in conjunction with overhead transparencies illustrating basic differences between creative and noncreative writing tasks and written products. These media were used in an attempt to minimize the teacher variable. The other part of the training program involved a practice session in which students responded to a creative writing task relative to a short story and a practice session in which they responded to a noncreative writing task relative to a short story.

Design of the Study

This study was designed primarily to determine the effects of two different kinds of writing tasks presented prior to reading and completed after reading on the development of student attitudes toward a short story. It was also designed to determine the effect of a pre-treatment training program.

Twenty twelfth-grade college-preparatory English classes from two Madison, Wisconsin high schools and judged to be alike in any variables that might influence the study were randomly assigned to four different treatments. The five classes assigned to treatment one received the creative writing task and the pre-treatment training program; the five classes assigned to treatment two received the non-creative writing task and the pre-treatment training program; the five classes assigned to treatment three received the creative writing task, but no pre-treatment training program; and the five classes assigned to treatment four received the noncreative writing task, but no pre-treatment training program. Thus two factors, each having two levels were employed in this experiment.

The procedure followed by the subjects was as follows:

1. Receive and study the writing task (creative for ten classes; noncreative for the other ten classes.)
2. Read the short story.
3. Complete the writing task.
4. Complete the attitudinal inventory.
5. Submit completed written product and inventory to teacher.

Analysis of the Data

Each of the written products was evaluated by three judges, graduate students teaching English composition courses at the University of Wisconsin. Each judge used a five-criteria scale constructed for this study to determine whether the content of a written product was essentially creative or non-creative. It was determined that with few exceptions the subjects had performed at the cognitive level which had been assigned to them. The Hoyt internal consistency reliability

coefficient, reflecting the agreement among judges, yielded a value of .95.

The attitudinal inventory scores were analyzed to determine a coefficient of reliability for the inventory. This reliability coefficient was .88.

Using the inventory scores, mean scores were calculated for each of the twenty classes. A two-way analysis of variance was applied to these class means to determine any significant differences in attitudinal development among the four treatments for (A) the training variable and (B) the writing task variable. The results of that analysis are presented in Table I.

TABLE I

Analysis of Variance for Attitudinal Inventory Scores

Source	d.f.	M.S.	F
Training (A)	1	2.20	1.37
Writing Task (B)	1	9.88	6.14*
A x B	1	.05	1
Residual	16	1.61	
Total	19		

* Significant at the $p = .05$ level

A significant difference at the .05 level was found to exist as the result of the writing task variable. No other significant differences were found. The mean of means for each of the two groups is given in Table II.

TABLE II

Mean Attitude Scores for Creative and Noncreative Groups

	Creative	Noncreative
Mean Trained	20.22	21.55
Mean Untrained	20.80	22.28

The significant difference that was found was in the opposite direction from that hypothesized. It had been hypothesized that the classes which received the creative writing task would develop significantly more positive attitudes toward the short story than those that received the noncreative writing task. The analysis indicated that the classes receiving the noncreative task developed more positive attitudes. Consequently, the major hypothesis of the study was rejected. However, the theoretical position that the cognitive level at which a literary selection is read influences attitudes toward the selection was supported.

An ancillary concern of the study was whether or not a pre-experiment training program would affect the attitudinal reactions of the subjects. As seen in Table I the training program had no significant effect on the attitudes developed by the subjects toward the story.

Conclusions of the Study

The major question this study asked is the following: Will a creative writing task relative to a short story, assigned pre-reading and completed after reading, develop more positive student attitudes toward the story than a noncreative writing task? The following ancillary question was also asked: Will students who are trained to distinguish between creative and noncreative writing tasks and written products differ in their attitudinal development from students who are not trained?

The results of this study indicate that creative writing tasks relative to a short story, assigned pre-reading and completed post-reading, did not cause student readers to develop more positive attitudes toward the story than non-creative writing tasks. In fact, the student subjects in this study developed more positive attitudes when they were oriented with the noncreative writing task. It seems legitimate to conclude that the kind of writing task assigned pre-reading does influence the attitudes of student readers toward what they read. Any conclusions regarding the direction and intensity of attitudinal development would have to be limited to the particular academic and ability levels of the subjects utilized in this study. It is also concluded that training students to recognize differences between creative and noncreative writing tasks and written products did not influence the students attitudinal development toward the story.

Discussion

Studies (1963) and observation (1965) indicate that our schools generally operate on noncreative bases. College-preparatory seniors have probably collected the majority of their school rewards from noncreative behavior and may well consider creative activity in the classroom as frivolous. Their reasonably well-defined college goal may cause them to react negatively to school activities which seem not to be consistent with their academic goals. Several of the classroom teachers who conducted the experiment observed that a considerable number of the students in the classes that received the creative task were rather uneasy about the assignment and questioned such things as the value of such activity and how a grade could be applied to their work. The fact that attitudes were developed more positively when a noncreative writing task was employed suggests strongly that by the time students attain this academic level, they are conditioned to respond more positively under the influence of a noncreative assignment. It should not be concluded that students at different academic and/or ability levels would develop the same attitudinal bias as the students in this study. Students with different

experiential backgrounds and goals might react quite differently.

Whether or not the results of this study can be applied to literary forms and selections different from the story used in this study is questionable. It is the opinion of the researcher that the kind of writing task used to orient student readers to any kind of reading will influence attitudinal development toward that reading.

The fact that the training program had no effect on the dependent variable is difficult to explain. It would seem that the training program might have answered any questions regarding the nature of what was expected and hence allayed any anxiety that may have caused negative reaction to creative involvement. It would also seem that the subjects who were trained would be more likely to fulfill the requirements of the tasks than those who were not trained. Probably the most logical conclusion would be that this particular kind of student did not require the training program to perceive what was asked of him by the writing task, nor was he sufficiently impressed by the training program to have his attitudinal development influenced. Perhaps the training program would have more effect on younger or less sophisticated subjects.

It would seem valuable to pursue the concerns of this study using creative and noncreative orientations to reading with students at different academic and ability levels and with different literary forms. This study is perceived by the researcher as a starting point toward building a fund of knowledge about the effects of stimulating students to read at specific cognitive levels on their attitudes toward what they read.

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